



State of Utah Department of Commerce

JON HUNTSMAN, JR.
Governor

RUSSELL C. SKOUSEN
Executive Director

JASON PERRY
Deputy Director

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Christine Keyser, Public Information Officer
Phone: (801) 530-6487
Cell: (801) 971-1980
e-mail: ckeyser@utah.gov

Consumers Cautioned Against Fraudsters

In the aftermath of the tsunami and southern Utah floods, the Utah Department of Commerce is alerting consumers of fraudsters who take advantage of the tragedy in a variety of ways. The Division of Consumer Protection (DCP) cautions consumers of bogus fundraising operations. DCP lists the following precautions consumers can take to ensure that their donations go to legitimate charities:

1. Ask for the name of the charity if a telephone solicitor does not provide it promptly.
2. Ask what percentage of your donation will support the cause described in the solicitation.
3. Verify that the charity has authorized the solicitation. Check out a charity by contacting the Division of Consumer Protection, 801-530-6601; www.consumerprotection.utah.gov. The federal government has established the following Web site for those interested in donating for tsunami and earthquake relief: www.usafreedomcorps.gov
4. Do not give out personal or financial information—including Social Security, credit card and bank account numbers—to anyone who solicits a contribution from you. Scam artists can use this information to commit fraud against you.
5. Ask for a receipt showing the amount of the contribution and stating that it is tax-deductible.
6. Do not give cash. For security and tax record purposes, it is best to pay by check – made payable to the beneficiary, not the solicitor.
7. Ask for identification if you are approached in person.

Another big problem following a disaster is the onrush for licensed contractors. When resources are low and limited, fly-by-night unlicensed contractors begin to surface. The Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing (DOPL) urges homeowners to verify their contractor's license by going to their Web site: www.dopl.gov and clicking on "Verify a License." For additional information, contact DOPL at 801-530-6628 or toll-free 866-275-3675.

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